

**Office of Internal Oversight Review**  
**Key Findings, Conclusions, and/or Recommendations of an Officer-Involved Shooting: Fatal**  
**4156 Pennwood Avenue – October 4, 2021**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to publish key findings, conclusions, and/or recommendations of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's (LVMPD) internal review of this incident. A variety of actions can be taken administratively in response to the Department's review of a deadly force incident. The review may reveal no action is required or determine additional training is appropriate for all officers in the workforce, or only for the involved officer(s). The review may reveal the need for changes in Department policies, procedures, or rules. Where departmental rules have been violated, formal discipline may be appropriate. The goal of the review is to improve both individual and Department performance.

**Synopsis of Event**

On October 4, 2021, at approximately 1836 hours, the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD) was involved in a critical incident under the LVMPD Event LLV211000015640. The incident occurred near 4156 Pennwood Avenue, Las Vegas, NV 89102. This address was located within the LVMPD Spring Valley Area Command (SVAC); sector beat Paul-Two (P2).

The incident was an officer-involved shooting (OIS). Gang Crimes Bureau (GCB) Officers Joel Blasko and Theron Young were the involved officers who discharged their firearms at suspect Demetrius Roberts, who was armed with a Taurus G2C 9mm handgun. Roberts was struck one time and was later pronounced deceased on-scene by medical units.

Prior to the OIS, GCB officers attempted a vehicle stop on a black Dodge Charger, driven by Roberts, for a traffic violation. Roberts initially pulled over but after officers exited their LVMPD marked patrol units, he fled in his vehicle. When they returned to their patrol vehicles, the officers were unable to locate Roberts or the Dodge Charger in the surrounding area. A records check on the Dodge Charger revealed the registered owner's address was located in the area of the 4000 block of Silver Dollar Avenue, Las Vegas, NV 89102.

While conducting a follow-up investigation, GCB officers located Roberts' vehicle in an alley near the registered owner's address. While parked in an unmarked LVMPD vehicle, GCB officers established surveillance nearby Roberts' vehicle. During the surveillance, the officers in the unmarked vehicle observed Roberts and a female approach. As they watched Roberts and the female, the officers witnessed Roberts physically assault the female. They broadcasted this information over the radio and requested assistance from a marked patrol unit.

Working as a GCB uniformed two-officer unit and while in their LVMPD marked patrol vehicle, GCB Officers Blasko and Young responded and entered the alleyway to contact Roberts and the female. Officer Young was driving the patrol vehicle with Officer Blasko in the passenger seat.

As Officers Young and Blasko arrived and parked near where Roberts and the female were, Roberts produced a firearm and shot multiple rounds at the officers as they exited their patrol vehicle. Officer Blasko, on the passenger side, was struck in his upper right leg by shrapnel. Officer Young exited the driver side and moved away from the patrol vehicle while drawing his handgun and taking a position of cover/concealment. Officer Young then discharged his weapon at Roberts.

After shooting at the officers, Roberts fled on foot toward Pennwood Avenue. Officer Blasko followed him, on foot, while Officer Young ran an alternate route to converge on Roberts. As Officer Young arrived on

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Pennwood Avenue, Roberts ran in his direction with the firearm still in his hand. Officer Young discharged his firearm a second time at Roberts, who immediately turned around, and ran towards Officer Blasko. With his handgun drawn, Officer Blasko discharged his weapon at Roberts. Simultaneously, Roberts fired one round at Officer Blasko.

Roberts then turned south as he fled away from Officers Young and Blasko, crossing Pennwood Avenue with the firearm still in his hand. Moments later, Officer Young discharged his firearm for a third time at Roberts who then fell to the ground on Pennwood Avenue.

With the arrival of additional officers, an immediate action team was created to approach and take Roberts into custody. Once Roberts and the surrounding area were made safe, officers provided life-saving measures on Roberts. With the arrival of medical personnel, Roberts was assessed and was pronounced deceased on-scene by medical personnel.

### **The Criminal Investigation**

The LVMPD's Force Investigation Team (FIT) conducted the criminal investigation of this incident. The investigation was submitted to the District Attorney's office for review and determined that, "no criminal prosecution of the officer or officers involved in the referenced case is appropriate."

For additional information related to the investigation of this incident, please refer to the LVMPD's FIT Report and the Clark County District Attorney's Legal Analysis Report and/or the Clark County District Attorney's Decision document.

### **LVMPD Administrative Review and Critical Incident Review Process**

It is the policy of this Department to provide LVMPD and the community with a thorough review of incidents wherein deadly force was used by Department members. The Critical Incident Review Process (CIRP) includes the participation of citizen board members who reside within the LVMPD jurisdiction, who are not personally affiliated with the Department, who are not related to any of its members, and who have not had prior law enforcement experience.

The CIRP is comprised of two related boards whose sole purpose is to conduct comprehensive administrative review of the tactics utilized by involved Department members as well as decision-making, Department policy, training, supervision, and the use of deadly force.

The Use of Force Review Board (UFRB) consists of commissioned and citizen members. The Critical Incident Review Team (CIRT) presents the facts related to the use of deadly force. The board issues findings regarding the actions of Department members who used, directly ordered, or directly influenced the use of deadly force, whether such force resulted in death or serious injury. The UFRB may choose from one of four findings after hearing the presentation of facts from CIRT. The findings are Administrative Approval, Tactics/Decision-Making, Policy/Training Failure, or Administrative Disapproval.

The Tactical Review Board (TRB) reviews CIRT conclusions. The TRB can validate, overturn, or modify the conclusions regarding the actions of Department members.

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The matter was heard by the UFRB and TRB on February 24, 2022. Below are the key findings, conclusions, or recommendations from the CIRP determined by the UFRB and TRB members and approved by the Sheriff.

### **Use of Force Review Board**

#### **UFRB: Officer Joel Blasko**

The Board's finding was Administrative Approval. Administrative Approval is defined as: "objectively reasonable force was used under the circumstances, based on the information available to the officers at the time." This finding acknowledges that the use of force was justified and within Department policy.

#### **UFRB: Officer Theron Young**

The Board's finding was Administrative Approval for all three of Officer Young's volleys of fire. Administrative Approval is defined as: "objectively reasonable force was used under the circumstances, based on the information available to the officers at the time." This finding acknowledges that the use of force was justified and within Department policy.

### **Tactical Review Board**

#### **Communication**

Communication can be verbal or non-verbal. It includes electronic transmission or in-person. A review of these recordings can provide valuable evidence of the circumstances surrounding a particular event.

During the call taking portion of the event, the call-takers accurately recorded and routed the information provided in a timely manner to the SVAC dispatcher.

- The administrative review determined all LVMPD call-takers performed within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

After Officer Young broadcasted shots fired, the SVAC dispatcher immediately placed a Code Red on the SVAC channel. The dispatcher continued to gather and document pertinent information and provided timely updates during and after the OIS.

- The administrative review determined the dispatching and broadcasting techniques utilized during the OIS were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

Prior to the OIS, most of the vital information shared was conducted on the GCB radio channel. When Officers Young and Blasko received information of Roberts physically assaulting the female, they immediately responded. However, Officers Young and Blasko did not notify the SVAC dispatcher they were responding. Therefore, at the time Officer Young broadcasted shots fired, the SVAC dispatcher was unaware of their location.

- The administrative review determined the radio traffic by Officers Young and Blasko was not within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

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**De-escalation**

Policing requires that at times an officer must exercise control of a violent or resisting subject to make an arrest or to protect the officer, other officers, or members of the community from risk of harm. Clearly, not every potential violent confrontation can be de-escalated, but officers do have the ability to impact the direction and the outcome of many situations based on their decision-making and the tactics they choose to employ. As a strategy to diminish the likelihood and the severity of force, officers will attempt to de-escalate confrontations.

When the GCB officers decided to conduct surveillance on the black Dodge Charger parked at 4156 Pennwood Avenue, they discussed their plan over the GCB radio channel. However, the collective briefing on the GCB radio channel was inadequate and should have been conducted in-person with all participating officers taking part in the surveillance and the GCB sergeant.

- The administrative review determined the preplanning during this incident was not within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

As Officers Young and Blasko arrived and parked their patrol vehicle, they observed Roberts run to the front of a white Chevrolet Avalanche parked in the alley. Officers Young and Blasko exited their patrol vehicle as Roberts fired multiple rounds in their direction. Officer Young moved to a more tactically sound position and returned fire. Officer Blasko assessed the situation and ran west in the last known direction Roberts was observed moving.

- The administrative review determined Officers Young and Blasko's approach to the call was within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

As Roberts opened fire on Officers Young and Blasko, Officer Young retreated to a position of cover behind parked vehicles. Officer Young continued to utilize parked vehicles for cover as he attempted to locate Roberts. After engaging with Roberts for the third time, Officer Young maintained his position of cover until additional resources arrived and took Roberts into custody.

Officer Blasko ran in Roberts' last known direction of travel. Officer Blasko utilized a building as cover and concealment as he attempted to relocate Roberts. Officer Blasko then moved east and utilized several parked vehicles as cover until additional resources arrived and took Roberts into custody.

- The administrative review determined Officers Young and Blasko's use of cover and concealment were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

**Use of Deadly Force**

It is the policy of this Department that officers hold the highest regard for the dignity and liberty of all persons and place minimal reliance upon the use of force. The Department respects the sanctity of every human life, and the application of deadly force is a measure to be employed in the most extreme circumstances where lesser means of force have failed or could not be reasonably considered.

The Department seeks to manage use of force beyond the Graham v. Connor (1989) standard and its minimum requirements by establishing further parameters for the application of force and to offer explicit direction to officers. Sound judgment, the appropriate exercise of discretion, and the adherence to

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Department policy will always be the foundation of officer decision-making in the broad range of possible use of force situations.

Officers will only use a level of force that is objectively reasonable to bring an incident or persons under control and to safely accomplish a lawful purpose. An officer's use of force must balance against the level of resistance exhibited by the subject. The level of force administered by an officer must be carefully controlled and should not be more than objectively reasonable to overcome the physical harm threatened.

In a confrontation, an officer will continuously reassess their response and adjust any use of force accordingly based upon the level of resistance encountered. Failure to reassess each application of force can lead to a violation of law and/or policy. The use of force by an officer must be within Department Policy which may be more restrictive than the U.S. Constitution.

At the time Officers Young and Blasko drew their firearms, Roberts was armed with a firearm which he pointed and discharged multiple rounds at the officers.

- The administrative review determined Officers Young and Blasko's drawing of their firearms were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

For this incident, Officer Young had three volleys of fire. The TRB discussed how during Officer Young's third volley of fire, he failed to control and assess his rate of fire. It was determined the speed of Officer Young's third volley was ineffective for proper assessment of backdrop.

- The administrative review determined Officer Young's assessment of backdrop, target identification, and isolation during his first and second volleys of fire were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.
- The administrative review determined Officer Young's assessment of backdrop, target identification, and isolation during his third volley of fire were not within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy

Officer Blasko had one volley of fire during this incident. His backdrop consisted of an unoccupied vehicle and the ground due to his elevated position.

- The administrative review determined Officer Blasko's assessment of backdrop, target identification, and isolation were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

Officer Young had three volleys of fire during the OIS. As Officers Young and Blasko arrived, Roberts fired multiple rounds at the officers. He fired through an occupied vehicle in order to shoot at the officers. Roberts fired for a second time at Officer Blasko when Officer Blasko confronted him on Pennwood Avenue. The firearm used by Roberts was in his hand each time Officer Young engaged him.

- The administrative review determined Officer Young's threat assessment for all three volleys of fire were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

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When Officer Blasko discharged his firearm, Roberts had already fired multiple rounds at the arriving officers, including one shot that wounded Officer Blasko in the leg from shrapnel. Roberts still had the firearm in his hand and shot one round at Officer Blasko as Officer Blasko engaged him.

- The administrative review determined Officer Blasko's threat assessment was within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

#### **Incident Management**

Supervisors will possess a thorough knowledge of tactics and ensure that officers under their supervision perform to a standard (in accordance with LVMPD policy and training). The prospect of a favorable outcome is often enhanced when supervisors become involved in the management of the overall response to a potentially violent encounter by coordinating officers' tactical actions.

Supervisors will acknowledge and respond to incidents in a timely manner when officer use of reportable force is probable. Supervisors will also manage the deployment of resources and equipment. In dynamic and highly-charged incidents, supervisors will provide clear direction and communication to officers regarding their positioning and roles. Upon observing substandard officer approaches or flaws in tactical decisions, the supervisor will promptly act to correct any deficiencies.

After the OIS, the Watch Commander lieutenant responded to the OIS and established the Command Post (CP) and media staging area. Another lieutenant obtained the Public Safety Statements from Officers Young and Blasko at the CP. The GCB sergeant responded to the incident immediately after hearing shots were fired, requested medical to the scene, preserved the crime scenes, separated the involved officers, assigned them monitoring officers and moved them to the CP. Additionally, the GCB sergeant also handled an unrelated vehicle accident that occurred in the crime scene. All supervisors worked together and managed the scene of the OIS and the CP.

- The administrative review determined the supervisors' response to this incident, and their management of the OIS and the CP were within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

#### **Additional Key Findings, Conclusions, and/or Recommendations**

After the OIS, Officer Young and the GCB sergeant immediately requested medical for Roberts and a female victim. After Roberts was taken into custody, he was immediately placed in the recovery position and was assessed for his injuries. An officer on scene learned Roberts did not have a pulse and performed CPR in an effort to resuscitate Roberts until medical arrived.

- The administrative review determined the medical response and intervention was within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.

Officer Young's firearm malfunctioned twice during the OIS. During an inspection of the firearm, it was determined Officer Young's handgun was dirty and the weapon's magazine had an aftermarket extension and magazine spring that was worn and weak. During the administrative investigation, it was determined the aftermarket extension and magazine spring caused both of Officer Young's malfunctions.

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- The administrative review determined Officer Young failed to maintain a reasonably clean and functional firearm for duty/official use. Therefore, Officer Young was not within standardized LVMPD tactics, training, and policy.